



Ways to integrate leadership skills into primary and secondary education

Leadership is increasingly recognized as an important skill that benefits learners in school, as they transition to the workplace, and throughout their careers. Learners who have leadership experiences in secondary school are more likely to attend further or higher education, and graduate.¹ Higher education institutions value leadership as a key outcome for graduating seniors.² Employers also expect graduates to have leadership experiences, and value this skill when making hiring decisions.³

There are many different models of leadership, but in the past few decades, there has been a particular interest in shifting the focus of leadership from managing and controlling to inspiring and motivating. We therefore focus on leadership as the process of managing or guiding the work of others in a transformational, inspirational, respectful, and supportive way. Leaders support and empower those they lead, guide others by establishing a vision, and foster collaboration.

Below are some ideas to give you inspiration for how students can develop and practice leadership skills at school.

Learning tasks	Skills involved
Write a report on a leader you admire.	This activity offers learners the opportunity to think deeply about what leadership means. Learners can consider why they admire or respect the leader they identified and reflect on what qualities make someone a good leader. Teachers could use this activity to engage the class in a conversation about leadership skills.
Leading a class discussion or meeting.	Learners of many different ages can practice basic leadership skills by leading a class discussion. Learners can establish vision on a small scale by setting an agenda or establishing goals. Learners can also practice the interpersonal skills needed to facilitate discussion and foster collaboration.
Serving in school leadership positions.	Many schools offer the opportunity to serve in school leadership positions. These can include positions in school government (e.g. class president), Head Boy/aGirl, or school prefects. In these roles, learners often serve as liaisons between other learners and faculty, which allows learners to practice the communication skills needed to be effective leaders. Learners must also consider a longer-term vision regarding what they would like to accomplish in their role and communicate that vision to their fellow learners and faculty. For learners who are too young to formally participate, assigning classroom leadership roles (such as class monitor) is an option. Many school clubs or organizations also offer learners the opportunity to take on leadership positions.
Mentoring a younger learner.	Mentoring someone allows learners to provide support and guidance to another individual. Learners can practice developing rapport, understanding someone else's goals and needs, and determining the best way to help meet those needs. This leadership activity would be more relevant for older learners, particularly those at the secondary level.
Roleplay a real world leadership situation.	Roleplayed examples allow learners to practice leadership scenarios that are not readily available in classroom settings. For example, learners could lead a roleplayed hiring committee to determine which job candidate to hire. In this example, group members could be given conflicting needs, which ensures that learners get to practice managing conflict as a leader.

¹ Lozano, F. A. (2008). *Language, high school leadership and the postsecondary outcomes of Hispanic students*. *Economics of Education Review*, 27(3), 342–353.

² Meacham, J., & Gaff, J. G. (2006). *Learning goals in mission statements: Implications for educational leadership*. *Liberal Education*, 92(1), 6–13.

³ National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017). *Job outlook 2018*. Pennsylvania, PA: National Association of Colleges and Employers.

These are the big ideas behind the learning activities overleaf. Use these to adapt the examples for your students, or as guidance to devise your own learning tasks.

Teach learners
what good
leadership
looks like

Learners benefit from explicit instruction regarding leadership skills and behaviors. It is important to emphasize that leadership is more than managing or controlling others.

1

Emphasize the collaborative and relational nature of leadership. Building open and genuine relationships with followers is an important component of good leadership.

2

Describe how everyone can demonstrate leadership skills, not just those in formal leadership positions. Share examples of people in a variety of positions demonstrating leadership.

3

Provide strategies for putting leadership skills into practice. For example, demonstrating how to ask open-ended questions that facilitate collaboration and discussion.

Help learners
develop
confidence in
their leadership
skills

As learners begin developing leadership skills, they should gain confidence as they acquire new knowledge and experiences. When learners believe that they can demonstrate leadership, they are more likely to seek out leadership opportunities in the future, further supporting their leadership skill development.

1

Foster positive leadership experiences by providing learners with a mixture of autonomy and support.

2

Provide a safe space for learners to try out leadership without fear of failure.

3

Help learners to reflect and make meaning from their leadership experiences so that they develop a deeper understanding of who they are as leaders. Teachers could provide reflection questions for students to answer, or encourage learners to keep a journal about their experience.

Encourage
participation in
extracurricular
activities

There are many opportunities outside of the classroom that are associated with the development of leadership skills. Teachers can encourage learners to participate in these activities and can offer learners opportunities to reflect on what they learned about leadership from these activities.

1

Team sports offer learners experiences where an individual's success is dependent on the performance of others, helping them learn about leadership and accountability.

2

Clubs and other organizations allow learners to take ownership of activities they are passionate about.

3

Volunteer and service learning opportunities help learners practice leadership while also serving and supporting others.

Provide
feedback on
leadership skills

In addition to learning about leadership, it is important for learners to have opportunities to practice leading and receive feedback.

1

Leadership can be practiced during naturally occurring leadership opportunities (e.g. leading a class discussion), or during simulated, roleplayed interactions.

2

Consider using rubrics as the basis for the evaluation of leadership skills and feedback.

3

Avoid feedback that is too critical as this may discourage learners. Feedback should highlight the positives while emphasizing steps for improvement.

Are you already incorporating leadership skills in your teaching?
Tell us how. efficacy@pearson.com